



Calvin Mires

Calvin Mires: [00:00:00] Education, when we come to that, it's really growth. It's the journey we're on. We're all on our own hero's journey. And good, bad experiences, it's all education.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:14] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we re-imagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:49] This is Annalies Corbin, your host of Learning Unboxed. And we are back again in Boston, Massachusetts for Learning Unboxed on the road. And as always, I'm super excited about my guest. And today, we have an individual who is near and dear to my heart and my backstory, somebody I've known for many years now. Joining us today is Calvin Mires, who is a Research Associate III with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:17] Everybody has heard of Woods Hole, whether you're into stuff that is under the deep water or not. Nat Geo, all those different sorts of things that we've experienced in life. So, Calvin's going to talk with us a bit about his journey in STEM because Calvin's journey doesn't fit the norm. And I think that as a case study around what's possible, what you can do, and some of the amazing opportunities that are out there that we don't necessarily always know we're headed our way is the pretty powerful things. So, Calvin, thank you for joining us.

Calvin Mires: [00:01:51] My pleasure, Annalies. Excited to be here. Gosh, I've known you in so many aspects of starting. Well, I got into maritime archaeology because I took a trip to Caesarea, Israel and volunteered over there, but I came to East Carolina University, where I earned my master's and then, later my PhD because of you. And that was awesome. And at the same time, as a student coming up through graduate school, man, that was intense and I loved it. And here we are.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:27] And here we are, yeah. Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:02:28] So many years later and I'm excited. So, yeah, let's get started.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:34] So, a little bit backstory from, I guess, most folks who listen as sort of serially, I guess, if you will, know that I am, by training, an anthropologist and an archaeologist, in particular. And my previous life prior to launching and starting PAST with a very dedicated group of folks when we did that was

actually as a maritime archaeologist, as Calvin indicated. And so, I met Calvin back when he was a grad student. He was actually one of my TAs.

Calvin Mires: [00:03:02] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:04] We're going to say a million years ago.

Calvin Mires: [00:03:06] Yeah, that sounds about right about now. It feels now, it's a different life.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:10] So, it's been a while. Yeah, different life. And, you know, at least from my perspective as it relates to some of that journey, you know, Calvin was always that curious student who was always willing to say yes, right? And that's a really, really important thing. And, you know, fast forward many years later to some extent and I have left the university, Calvin had gone on to work on his PhD. He has also been a part of the faculty and staff at the university. And then, one day, I bump into Calvin at a conference as stuff happens.

Calvin Mires: [00:03:46] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:46] And, you know, he tells me he might be interested in something new. And at that time at PAST, we were in need of a new bridge program director-

Calvin Mires: [00:03:55] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:56] ... as we were growing our student experiences in STEM. And I thought, "Hey, Calvin could bring a new and different sort of approach to this." And so, Calvin came on board at PAST.

Calvin Mires: [00:04:08] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:08] And in that role, got to do a lot of really, what I think of are pretty darn amazing things, but I want you-

Calvin Mires: [00:04:15] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:15] ... Calvin, really to sort of tell us a little bit about, first and foremost, since it's a program around teaching and learning and sort of the best case studies and impacts on that, I want to spend our time sort of talking about the journey in STEM-

Calvin Mires: [00:04:30] Yeah, sure.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:30] ... and the educational outreach and engagement. And out of full disclosure for both you and for our guest, a lot of your work at the graduate level in your maritime work was based on that notion of that public component of that work.

Calvin Mires: [00:04:44] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:44] So, that came naturally to you.

Calvin Mires: [00:04:47] Yeah. So, just a little background, I'm a teacher by training. Both my folks were educators and teachers when I grew up out in Montana, an area not known for its coastline.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:57] Small coastline.

Calvin Mires: [00:05:01] Yeah, small. Very small. And actually, it's why when Annalies said, "Oh, I do Western River Steamboats", I'm like, "Really? Cool." But the question that I had even going through grad school was, "So, what's the point? And who cares? And why does it matter?" And for me, those answers were easy because I had chosen to follow a certain discipline, a certain career. But as an educator, I was always trying to get that bigger message out. And as Annalies mentioned, as I did my PhD, it was interdisciplinary. And I was interested in these bigger types of questions. So, when I finished that up, as we're kind of like, "Okay, I've completed my academic journey. What's the next journey?" And we met actually at a conference like this one I think out in Seattle and-

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:51] I don't even remember.

Calvin Mires: [00:05:51] Yeah. Well, I do. These are kind of seminal moments because basically, we had a nice informal conversation and then, a couple of months later, I got a phone call and said, "Well, why don't you come out to Columbus, Ohio and see what we're doing at PAST?" Of course, I was aware of what PAST was through our relationship. And so, we did. We went out and I'll keep it kind of short, but it was a chance to take some of my ideas that I was thinking and as I remember saying that, you know, it was an area for a petri dish.

Calvin Mires: [00:06:29] It was a safe place. And I'm talking about PAST. And you just purchased the warehouse, the back. And you're showing me this vision and all of this and it was like, "Cool. And why not? You know, let's see what can be done." And in that year, I spent at PAST as the director of bridge programs, was a chance to play. It was a chance for me. And by the way, I didn't realize this until after I left, because in the heat of the moment, you're just trying to get to the next program and do it, but people would come in with their ideas. And this is the thing I took away after, is you would hear these ideas and you're thinking, "Okay, what can I do with this?" That's the initial.

Calvin Mires: [00:07:19] But as you start to listen more and more, you've started to—well, what I realized in my opinion was the details weren't the important part, it was the passion, it was the connections that people were making. And once you started to do that, these new innovative kind of programs like STEM of Tai chi or machine learning, you know, all these different things that came from different perspectives was a really kind of a fun opportunity. And that wasn't something grad school would ever prepare you for. It was really, when I went to the PAST Innovation Lab and, you know, I viewed it as a petri dish and-

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:02] It's definitely a petri dish.

Calvin Mires: [00:08:03] Yeah. And I'm sure it still is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:05] Nothing's changed.

Calvin Mires: [00:08:07] Yeah. But that was the fun part of that. And so, you know, at the end of it, I still had my path that I was still very much interested in with the maritime field and came up to Massachusetts, but there was no program supporting me. I have no budget. Just basically, my wife got a job at a state college and we came up here. And my background in education, but also more importantly, a background of listening, I would go into academic department and said, "I'm interested in maritime archaeology."

Calvin Mires: [00:08:42] And you'd say, "Oh", their eyes would kind of go, "That's interesting." And then, you see them roll back and says, "But that doesn't matter to us." And I said, "Well, you know, what happens if we

look at it from coding or what happens if we're looking at 3D printing? And wouldn't it be cool if a kid who was interested in that played on it on a 400-year old shipwreck?" And they're like, "Oh, that'd be great." And so, that was the mantra, is finding these connections with a really neat field, but it was because of that background of listening and understanding what people needed.

Calvin Mires: [00:09:15] And I know it's a successful kind of day when they talk more than I do. I go to a cold talk, right? And I kind of doing what I'm, right now, kind of rambling a little bit, but sooner or later, their eyes light up. And you've probably seen this. And then, suddenly, they go, "Oh." And then, they're throwing ideas back at you and what you realize is you haven't talked for 30 minutes. Now, you know that we have something here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:40] Yeah. And that's the best way to go. And I want to make sure that, you know, folks are really clear that when Calvin came to me as a grad student many years ago, again, you know, your background in education, to some extent and teaching, you were a social studies teacher or poli sci.

Calvin Mires: [00:10:01] I wasn't-

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:02] You had been teaching.

Calvin Mires: [00:10:02] I was actually Latin and Greek.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:05] Oh, that's right. Yes. Yes. That's right.

Calvin Mires: [00:10:07] I have a whole presentation on how to make your parents concerned with your career choices. That worked out.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:13] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:10:15] That worked out.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:15] That worked out. That's right.

Calvin Mires: [00:10:17] That's important. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:17] Well, my point with that and the reason I wanted to bring that forward is because we get all the time and I hear it and in fact, I did an interview earlier today and I heard this very thing in town that, you know, you have to be in a STEM field to be in STEM. And that's one of those great misnomers, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:10:36] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:36] That STEM is foundational. It is in everything. There is not a discipline. There is not a career. There is not an activity that we do as humans on the planet earth, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:10:48] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:48] That is not somehow STEM-related. The lens and the point of view-

Calvin Mires: [00:10:53] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:53] ... on the experience you bring to it are all going to be very different, but those letters are not relevant at all, the foundational pieces, design thinking. And so, for you as a teacher in classics to-

Calvin Mires: [00:11:04] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:04] ... suddenly find yourself fully enmeshed in creating STEM program, we're going to get to that in a minute, the stuff that you do now, that's not unheard of. And it's also not a natural. In fact, that's one of the best ways to get at it.

Calvin Mires: [00:11:19] Absolutely. And the whole notion of I have many Corbin quotes that I keep in my index and most of them are really, really inspirational.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:29] Are they clean?

Calvin Mires: [00:11:29] Most of them. But one of them is, "STEM is just effective teaching. Science, technology, engineering, math is life."

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:39] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:11:40] And we talk about it and you'll hear that when you go and talk to either a department or a dean, like, "Oh, well, you're going to talk to the STEM people." Well, then that's the great thing about the maritime history and I get into it, I said, "Well, this is where history meets STEM", I use that. But if we think about just technology and how we're getting here, it's communication, it's connections. And that's all STEM is. It's how you transmit knowledge, education through generations. And archaeology is simply understanding the STEM of the past. That's all it is, is understanding human behavior. So, there's all these different kinds of connections, but you're right, you get into it and people get really locked into, you know, the acronyms.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:28] That's unfortunate, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:12:29] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:30] As Calvin well knows, I collect the acronyms and over the years, I have collected some-

Calvin Mires: [00:12:38] One of my quotes, too. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:39] ... pretty awesome ones, right? And I highlight them and I use that to sort of talk about the ridiculousness, I guess, if you will, of the scenario. But at the end of the day, I understand why folks are focused on that, because we do have this massive workforce and industry gap specifically-

Calvin Mires: [00:12:56] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:56] ... in those areas.

Calvin Mires: [00:12:57] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:57] Right? And so, we do need to work very collectively and collaboratively around finding and identifying opportunities for students to discover and be passionate about whatever their career is. And if that's within these great needs STEM areas-

Calvin Mires: [00:13:17] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:17] ... where we desperately need people, that's great. But if not, that's great, too. And so, you know, we, at PAST, spend a lot of time helping kids explore those opportunities and finding passions. And that's one of the things that I was thrilled to see that you were able to take with you when you left PAST. And, you know, as Calvin said, he was only with us in that role for a year because life happened and he and his family needed to come to Massachusetts. So, we were bummed and sorry, but we were thrilled to see him go off and do amazing things and then, take the things that hopefully that he learned either with us or through us into that new space. And that, you know, long term, our hope was that we would be able to learn and gain back from Calvin. So, I want to talk a little bit about the STEM camp.

Calvin Mires: [00:14:02] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:03] So, you sort of made your way in Massachusetts, you know, pulling together a variety of different projects and some programs that you were able to do it a number of different institutions.

Calvin Mires: [00:14:13] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:13] And so, tell us about sort of the where and the why of the STEM camps and the focus that you take and how that then translates back into that sort of—because a lot of it in the middle school space, which we know to be the sweet spot, so desperate.

Calvin Mires: [00:14:29] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:29] So, how does that then ultimately translate back into a traditional classroom teacher's experience, their practice?

Calvin Mires: [00:14:37] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:40] Start with telling us about the program.

Calvin Mires: [00:14:41] Sure.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:41] And then, we'll get into the nuts and bolts of it.

Calvin Mires: [00:14:43] Sure. And that's a really great question. And I think in starting with this again, another thing I took from PAST is that there is no monopoly on good ideas. And here's another Corbinism is, you know, "If you surround yourself with talented people, it makes your job much easier." And one thing I look for is when I go in to talk to teachers or to schools and start talking is I look for sparks in eyes and I call it, don't kill my unicorn.

Calvin Mires: [00:15:15] In the sense of it's a beautiful moment of creating something that's never been created for us. It's almost mythical and it's powerful. And what you're looking for is somebody who doesn't say, "Well, how are you going to make it happen?" Because at this point of the process of the mythical nature of

this, you're looking for inspiration, you're looking for somebody who gets that passion that you feel, because that's going to translate.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:37] Can I steal that, by the way?

Calvin Mires: [00:15:39] Yes, you can.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:39] Don't steal my unicorn.

Calvin Mires: [00:15:40] I say it all the time.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:41] Can I borrow that?

Calvin Mires: [00:15:42] Yeah, you please do. Please, please.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:43] I'm going to make-

Calvin Mires: [00:15:44] Yeah, if you could call it Mirism.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:44] I'm going to make it a talk, I think.

Calvin Mires: [00:15:46] Please. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:46] I love that.

Calvin Mires: [00:15:47] No, I do it, is when I go off and I'll, you know, "Oh, we can do this and this", and somebody is like, "Well, how are you going to make that happen?" I'll just turn to them now and I'll say, "Please don't kill my unicorn, I'm flying it", right? Because yes, I realize logistics happen.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:01] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:16:02] Reality happens and it's not going to be what I think it is now. But let's enjoy that moment. And I look for people who get that. That's my first thing. If I'm in a room and I'm talking and somebody gets it, then right, there's a connection. I'm a big believer in connections. And I'll focus on that person. And we'll keep talking and we'll brainstorm, you know, the design process. Here you go, right? Here's our brain. That's the unicorn face. That's the fun. You throw mud on the wall. You see what sticks. You know not all of it's going to be there, but it's a fun, messy time.

Calvin Mires: [00:16:33] And I would say embrace the messiness. And this all plays into it because I didn't have a direct plan, I mean, coming up here, how this was going to work. We had run one college field camp through Salem State University. That was college level, very traditional. And that was at the summer before I came to PAST officially. And then, we were asked back. But in that year, I worked at PAST, we applied for a grant and got it through the Maritime Heritage Program, yeah, through the Park Service and worked with a school up in Salem Collins Middle School, which we found. It was serendipitous.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:12] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:17:12] And it was going to be regional. We were looking around. I went in and I talked to five or six, seven different principals, I don't know the number, and I found one.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:20] Right. Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:17:21] And he was like, "Let's do it."

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:22] Yeah. Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:17:23] Boom. Just like that. And it was magic. And-

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:27] But it's always magic-

Calvin Mires: [00:17:28] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:28] ... when you find a building leader-

Calvin Mires: [00:17:31] Yeah. Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:31] ... who says, "Let's do this thing."

Calvin Mires: [00:17:35] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:35] It doesn't matter that I don't fully understand it, you know, I-

Calvin Mires: [00:17:39] That's the unicorn part of that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:40] "Let's try-

Calvin Mires: [00:17:41] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:41] ... this thing because it sounds kind of cool."

Calvin Mires: [00:17:43] Exactly.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:43] "And maybe, it will be cool."

Calvin Mires: [00:17:45] Yes. And that's the connection.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:46] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:17:47] That's the person you're looking for. And it could be at any level. You know, you want somebody to make it happen. And this is what happened. It was somebody who wanted to hop on the unicorn, you know, without all the details, but you knew you had a colleague, you knew you had a partner, you knew you had somebody who's going to try to make it happen. And they did. And we worked with this middle school and it was fantastic. And through that, I learned, again, the design process. "Okay. This worked well with college, this didn't." But one of my favorite experiences, again, coming from PAST and we took the PAST model, I went through PAST. There was a grant for that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:21] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:18:22] So, we did-

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:22] It's on National Park Service.

Calvin Mires: [00:18:23] And we did the, you know, there was a real-world problem they had to solve by the end of the week. And part of that was to be able to display and disseminate and educate the vice superintendent for the region, for the school district on what they did for the week and also, why this shipwreck mattered. And we had a couple of students who were on the spectrum. And, you know, they were challenging all week and they pushed you and they got under you and they made the best damn presentation out of everybody.

Calvin Mires: [00:18:57] They did a virtual tour in the sense of they created a PowerPoint and had links, so it's kind of like this multiple choice, choose your own adventure. And I sat there, and this is all Friday, the last day we had, and he was quiet for the first time all week for four hours. There was a time, I'm like, "Are you ready?" He's like, "Yeah." "Check this out." And we did it. And I mean, listeners might, but you have the ship parts, the terms, walked us through. He had significance. He said, "Okay, I'm going to click here." We went to the STEM, stern, you know. It's one of those, it's those ones-

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:34] It was magical.

Calvin Mires: [00:19:35] It was magical.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:36] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:19:37] And sorry, guys.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:38] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:19:39] But you saw the unicorn flying off, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:41] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:19:42] But it wouldn't have happened again without paying attention, listening, and knowing who was actually interested and not trying to force my preconceived notions of how this program should be when we started back in January, but just letting it evolve. Following the leads of, you know, even though I was the director of it, backing off, trusting the people, trusting the people I worked with, the staff at PAST, Ashley Bloom. It was magical in her own right in getting everything together and following her guidance because of her experience and had seen it come to there. And I think as that plays out, you realize how important the teamwork is and you realize that's really education in its nutshell, right? And I'm not just telling anything anyone doesn't know, but experiential is another type of connection.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:40] And it's also a type of connection that multiple learners can take advantage of. And I think that that's one of the other things. And certainly for us, at PAST, one of the reasons that we so very, very strongly advocate that, you know, there's all this based learning opportunities. There is project-based, there's place-based, there is work-based, you know, take your pick-

Calvin Mires: [00:21:02] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:02] ... of the flavor of the month, I don't really care. What they all have in common-

Calvin Mires: [00:21:07] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:07] ... is that they are based quite literally on the notion that we have this applied and engaged connection.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:14] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:15] And that we are stepping away from the traditional style of teaching and learning and instead are embracing a thing that's immersive, right? And as we know-

Calvin Mires: [00:21:24] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:24] ... for a wide array of learners that walk into your camps or in your classroom, you don't know what you're going to get. You don't get to choose-

Calvin Mires: [00:21:31] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:31] ... for the most part, there are a few scenarios where you do.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:34] You play with the cards you're dealt.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:35] Exactly.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:36] And that's-

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:37] But when you create that kind of environment, it's an inclusive environment.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:41] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:42] And it makes room for every participant not just to learn, but to also be part of the outcome collectively.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:50] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:51] And that's a very different approach.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:54] It really is. And another example, can I give another example? It's-

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:56] Yeah, absolutely. Please.

Calvin Mires: [00:21:58] So, I ran another camp with high schoolers at my current university, Bridgewater State University, where I teach as adjunct there, as well as my research at Woods Hole. And so, I ran a summer camp through their STEM called the Case Center for Advancement of STEM Education. And the students I had all were heavily from a science and coding background. And really couldn't care anything about history or so they told me regularly the first day, that they were there, they were on scholarship and they heard that they could make us some 3D prints and they came to this. And their goal was to actually document timbers from a shipwreck that sits in the basement of Pilgrim Hall Museum from 1626 called the Sparrow

Hawk, the oldest colonial shipwreck that's the extent that we know of. Of course, they didn't quite get that when I mentioned it at first, because-

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:05] Nor did they care, did they?

Calvin Mires: [00:23:06] Oh, no, no. They looked at me just like, "Oh, those are nice words", right? And I really, you know-

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:12] "Come on, Dr. Mires-

Calvin Mires: [00:23:13] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:13] ... make this relevant to me."

Calvin Mires: [00:23:14] Yes, exactly. And you can see it there. And I said, "And you know what? That's okay."

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:19] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:23:19] And I've learned to embrace that, too. I've learned to embrace the whole looking at me like, you know, "You've seen right through me and who are you?" Right? Because I know where they're going to be at the end of it. And that's human nature, too. It's, you have to earn trust. And when you're up there, you realize, and this is important to us as teachers, it's not about you. You know, it's the reverse, it's about them.

Calvin Mires: [00:23:45] And what they're doing at that moment is sizing you up. Are you going to care? And that's how I view it. They're sizing you up, not just for your knowledge, because we might forget stuff all the time. What they're really sizing you up in the next couple times is, do you care? Do you care about what you're talking about? Do you care about how you're talking about it? And through that, because that's the medium as an instructor at the beginning, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:08] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:24:09] Well, it's not. And what they're really hearing is, do you care about me?

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:14] Yeah. Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:24:15] Because if you care about those two things—and in the environment and before the hierarchy kind of breaks down, right? When we're doing the introductions. If we can figure out that you're sincere and you care about what you're saying, "Well, okay, we'll trust you. If you care about that and you care about presenting it to me at this moment, maybe you care about me." And it's a slow build up. And I think good friendships in my experience have always been a slow burn. And I embrace the slow burn. We do warm ups and everything, so I get to know their name, but I see skepticism. I see, "So, make it relevant to me, Dr. Mires", right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:54] And that's the thing, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:24:55] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:56] At the end of the day, it's part of human nature. And I think that's part of sort of stepping back from it and recognizing sort of the where and the why of the learner, right? And, you know, we need to find a personal connection to the things that we are investing in.

Calvin Mires: [00:25:16] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:16] And it's no different than a child or students along the way or a worker at, you know, a company or an industry, the reality is the same, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:25:26] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:27] I have to find a meaningful way for me to care about this. And so, then let's circle back around and talk about—wait, he says. Wait.

Calvin Mires: [00:25:37] Before we go to the next one, to finish that off, though, at the end of the week and somebody came and did a nice article and there's a great quote in it that says, "I was really, really nervous to be holding a piece from 400 years ago and it was amazing" or so that I'm paraphrasing, I can't remember. And because they didn't tell me. I didn't know. At the end of the week, I knew they had a good time, but it was kind of like when I read that quote and it's online somewhere, I can't remember off the top of my head. But it was, you know, when you did a good job and they didn't compliment me, but they did in the best way possible.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:15] Right. Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:26:16] They got it. And they said it. And now, they had combined their STEM, where they came in with that deeper connection to people in the past. So, that's where that ended up. And so, that was a really powerful like yes, that was a reward.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:34] It is. And then, how does that same experience then translate back into teachers in the classroom? Because you don't just take students into the field with you, you know, you've had teachers participate in some of the same programs.

Calvin Mires: [00:26:47] Yeah. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:48] So, let's talk a little bit about-

Calvin Mires: [00:26:50] Sure.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:50] ... sort of that connection, that takeaway, I guess the question that I have for you-

Calvin Mires: [00:26:57] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:57] ... is I know how we do it at PAST and I know how we showed you to do it.

Calvin Mires: [00:27:00] Yes. Right. That I did, yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:01] But the reality is when you're out and you're off on your own, how is it that you achieve the same sort of takeaway-

Calvin Mires: [00:27:10] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:10] ... from your participants, whether you follow, track, or provide ongoing services back to those schools or teachers are not as important as, Calvin, as the expert in that moment-

Calvin Mires: [00:27:23] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:24] ... how do you know that connection's being made for that teacher?

Calvin Mires: [00:27:29] Well, again, when you can't tell outside of size and age, at least in the fields or schools that I've run or we've had teachers on board, when you can't tell who's a student or who's a teacher. So, I can answer this probably best with an example again, where we had teachers out working with students and we call them scholars, actually. And all of them were scholars. So, we can, you know, remove the distinguish between students and teachers because they wore those hats out there to begin with.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:06] And you didn't want that?

Calvin Mires: [00:28:07] No. And that's where we're going.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:09] Right. Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:28:09] By the end of the week, you had this, they were equal scholars.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:13] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:28:13] The kids were teaching the teachers. They were working together. And when you said, "Okay, what are the buddy teams?" And like, "Oh, me and-" It wasn't even mister or a missus, anything, it was, "Oh, we're going to be working together without hesitation, with connections." And so, it was a crew.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:37] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:28:38] And again, another reason I love the field work aspect. And if, I think field work, you think it has to be, you know, out in the open, outdoors, but really, it is just another term. We talk about STEM, it's just team work to accomplish a goal. And in any successful team, at some point, gels.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:02] And any successful team finds the participants teaching each other all the time.

Calvin Mires: [00:29:10] Yeah, that's what I mean.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:10] And over and over again, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:29:11] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:12] But that is the difference between a team that is purely hierarchical for the purposes of getting a job done-

Calvin Mires: [00:29:19] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:19] ... and a team that's collaborative-

Calvin Mires: [00:29:22] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:24] ... with the same goal in mind, but it functions very, very differently.

Calvin Mires: [00:29:29] It does. And I think one has shown itself to be more sustainable over long hauls. Both are models.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:36] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:29:37] But I've noticed that teams that are, you know, based in hierarchy, you'll have people leave or break apart at different rungs in the ladder, then you'll have to fill that in, where that version is more of a circle. You know, it rolls, it moves together. You know what? People leave, but for different reasons, not because they're disgruntled, but like, again, with me, I love PAST. I loved working there from what I learned, but I knew I had a different journey. And I was excited about where it was going. And you know what? When I announced it, everybody there supported it. You don't know how that's going to go. And I'm saying that a hierarchical model doesn't have that, but in my experience, when people leave, it's for different reasons.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:30] But it translates directly and I think this is an intriguing thing. And the reason I ask the question is because it's very difficult sometimes. Not always, sometimes, right? To transition from being the single point of authority in a learning environment, whether it be a classroom-

Calvin Mires: [00:30:53] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:53] ... in a middle school or high school. You see it less so in an elementary school because the dynamics are different, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:30:59] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:59] But certainly about the time you get to middle school and absolutely, by the time we're in high school and into post-secondary-

Calvin Mires: [00:31:06] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:06] ... there should be an opportunity to see a shift to allow the learners to develop back to something you said earlier-

Calvin Mires: [00:31:16] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:16] ... that sense of confidence, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:31:17] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:18] And they can't be confident of what they know if you don't let them lead or you don't let them make decisions and they look to you for permission-

Calvin Mires: [00:31:29] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:29] ... because they're kids, they're students. And even our collegiate students, I mean, I can't tell you how many times at East Carolina that, you know, my grad students would come in my door, "Now, Dr. Corbin, can I?"

Calvin Mires: [00:31:41] Yeah. And-

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:42] Right? And so, there's that notion, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:31:43] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:44] It's in the brain. And so, it's very, very tough to change that paradigm.

Calvin Mires: [00:31:48] And you know what? It's also very easy to slip back into that. And, you know, in all honesty, I do teach classes as adjunct and sometimes, you know, you have four courses in a semester and you're busy and suddenly, you realize, yeah, it's easier, right? It's easier to have that paradigm to lecture that. And inevitably, those have always been the classes or courses when I walked out, said, "Wow. Something was missing", because it's hard. It's hard to let go.

Calvin Mires: [00:32:22] And even with my experience of having done that and seen how successful it is, you still use— again, when we talk about connections, there is this moment of vulnerability. There is a moment. It might be small, it might be thin, it might be just a threshold, but no matter where it is, it's a moment of trust and you put yourself out there. And I think sometimes, it doesn't work out. You know, I've tried a few. You know, you put yourself out there and you think you have this and the connection doesn't happen.

Calvin Mires: [00:32:57] And it hurts because you did, you thought a lot about it. But then, if you kind of go back and reflect on that, what was the real motivation? Was it because you love the idea so much and they didn't? Well, who's that serving? You know, aren't you just kind of, in some ways, serving your own ego? Like, "This is a great idea. Oh, they didn't like it. Well, why didn't they like it? Must have them, no?" Probably it's looking at this, and you go in the deep reflection and you realize the path, you got too caught up. You fell again. You fell into that trap of thinking your idea was the best.

Calvin Mires: [00:33:38] They didn't get it, so it must be them and that hurts. But in reality, you didn't trust them. You didn't let them take it on their own and sometimes, just take a step back, come back to the class, do it in a different way. So, you know what? For these next three weeks, I'm not talking. I hope they do. And sure enough, they'll do a research. And we just had a very similar semester where they, you know, in a myth, we use myth to—I teach them mythology course and we use it to get into issues of social justice and me, too and looking at how these have been prescribed through culture. And it's very scary when you get into very controversial topics.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:19] It can be, right? But you gave a vehicle to those students, right? And-

Calvin Mires: [00:34:23] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:23] ... you made it okay.

Calvin Mires: [00:34:24] And you heard me kind of pause right there, because that's the moment where I'm like, I want to explain to make it safe for them, but if you stop and embrace the silence, they start to pick it up and their voices come through and I heard some great papers that came out, some of the best papers I read. But whatever. So, that's mythology. But it's still effective teaching. It still has you take it back to your classroom.

You know, it's that vulnerability that you put yourself out there. And I guess coming back to what you asked about earlier with the teachers is that you saw it. You saw them give up something. Control. And they started to work with the kids.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:06] I think one of the other things in those scenarios and I saw it in the program that you did, when you and Ashley came out and ran that.

Calvin Mires: [00:35:15] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:16] And a lot of the day-to-day because I was monitoring all of that happening very closely, right? Because you were relatively new-

Calvin Mires: [00:35:23] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:23] ... in that sort of space, right? And so, you know, one of the things that I think that we see over and over again from the teacher perspective is you took those teachers who participated and they were there for a variety of reasons because the head administrator that said, "Hey, let's do this thing", right?

Calvin Mires: [00:35:45] Yeah. Like they had been sent to us.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:45] And so, they had signed on. However, what they spent time with you doing was not what they know, nor was it their comfort zone. And you plank them down in the middle of all of that that you handed to them-

Calvin Mires: [00:36:02] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:02] ... from the get go and said, "Hey, it's a big, scary world." And you said, "And oh, by the way, you're also not going to lead or be the expert. Instead, you're going to be immersed and learn as the student." That is not something oftentimes after we leave our teacher prep programs that we have the opportunity to come back to and embrace or try again.

Calvin Mires: [00:36:28] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:28] And for me, anyway, every chance that I've had the opportunity to be in the field with teachers in that sort of immersive field environment with kiddos, I'm always struck by it. And I assumed that you saw the power of that.

Calvin Mires: [00:36:45] I did. And you brought up a memory with that, where the teachers who were participating at the beginning, who would they look for to answer their—first of all, some of them had the most questions. Like you talk about people needed structure right after that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:58] Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:36:59] It was like, "Well, how do I do this? How do I do this?" And who are they asking at the beginning of the week would always be-

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:05] Yeah, you.

Calvin Mires: [00:37:06] And they wouldn't look at anyone else. It was direct, right? "Oh, hey." And laser-focus right on me. And by the end of the week, well, chicken and egg, I didn't hear as many questions. I don't know if they had as many or—and when I did see this, they were asking-

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:23] The students.

Calvin Mires: [00:37:23] ... the students and the people around them and they weren't looking to me. And they were also accepting that maybe they didn't know everything and didn't need the parameters, because again, with at least the teachers that were involved, they needed the parameters, "Well, how is this going to fit? What are we going to do right here? Where are we going?" That's the big one. You know, sometimes, I don't give a lot of direction at the beginning of the week because of the self-discovery.

Calvin Mires: [00:37:46] And you'll hear, "Oh, that seems a little disorganized" or "We didn't get clear instructions right off the bat." Well, they had the instructions they needed. I didn't give the details on everything because there was discovery. Very uncomfortable, very uncomfortable. And yet, by the end of the week, the smiles and then, also the feedback and it was usually something to start off, "Yeah, we didn't know it on Monday, but it made so much sense on Thursday and Friday." And then, in my opinion, is because they did it themselves and they work to figure it out.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:22] And that then carries over to sort of—at least from my perspective and certainly from the work at PAST is if we see as part of our sort of mission and vision or our give to the world is to help classrooms transition from that old school-

Calvin Mires: [00:38:40] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:40] ... factory-based scenario that was very effective, our educational system, when we developed it 150 years ago, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:38:49] Sure.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:49] It's no longer relevant today, right? So, we are in the space of, you know, an opportunity.

Calvin Mires: [00:38:55] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:56] It's not even a detriment, but it's this great opportunity that the moment has come to do in a complete system overhaul and redesign. And part of that redesign is we no longer need to teach everything. We no longer need to be an entity or an endeavor that is based on this notion of rote memorization, because, A, we live in a very, very different world-

Calvin Mires: [00:39:23] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:23] ... with a whole different set of collective tools and things at our disposal. I was recently speaking at a STEM event and I remember reaching over and I had sitting on the podium my cell phone and I said, you know—because somebody had asked me, "What's your vision? What's the thing that you hope for the future?" And I just picked it up. It was my timer, I picked it right up off the podium and I held it up to the room and I said, "You know, we need to stop teaching all the stuff that's inside here-

Calvin Mires: [00:39:56] Because it's there, yeah. I-

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:57] ... and instead, teach everything this doesn't know. If we start teaching that and stop teaching everything that I can look up in this thing-

Calvin Mires: [00:40:08] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:09] ... now, that's 21st century education."

Calvin Mires: [00:40:12] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:12] And it will never work if it's not immersive, in my opinion.

Calvin Mires: [00:40:18] Yeah. You run into this whole debate on cellphones and I always think of students looking, when constructed, it is their encyclopedia. There's so much within that that they can collaborate and I've worked hard to have them engage with, you know, whether it's university social media that we have, one is different designed with that or even Twitter, it's how current generations communicate. And as you say, tapping into the power of that communication facilitates it.

Calvin Mires: [00:40:57] And I don't really have much insight with that, but as you watch students and as they move around and even with my own daughter and how she is friends with people she hasn't seen in five years, where I don't know where—I mean, you know, we used to be, when you move away, that was the end of it, but she still knows how her friends from Ohio or from Pennsylvania or North Carolina are doing. You have that facilitation of knowledge and of personal or human connections.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:33] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:41:34] And how you then can then wade through that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:38] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:41:38] Critically thinking about that and accessing that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:41] And that's the key, yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:41:42] And that's what-

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:43] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:41:43] And how you process that, because as we know, there's a whole bunch of-

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:48] Well, there's good stuff and bad stuff.

Calvin Mires: [00:41:50] Of course. And that-

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:50] That's the reality, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:41:50] That's the reality. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:52] So-

Calvin Mires: [00:41:53] But yeah. And that's how it's always been, too, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:54] Right.

Calvin Mires: [00:41:56] Even journalism throughout history, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:58] It's just easier to get to the good and the bad right now, right?

Calvin Mires: [00:42:01] Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:02] Yeah. Because it's just in your pocket and it's instantaneous.

Calvin Mires: [00:42:05] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:06] Yeah.

Calvin Mires: [00:42:06] And it's wonderful if you have a question. It's like, "Oh, It's right here." But it's how you wade through that. And then, it's how you filter and share and understand it. And I think there is a critical gap because as you said, there's good and bad. And it seems if you just throw one against the wall as a stick, who says it loudest anymore is, you know, not the best way to go about it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:32] That's true. I haven't thought of that. That's a very true statement. So, one of the things I like to do as I get ready to wrap this program is I always ask my guests to imagine that you are a teacher, formal or informal, right? And you are at someplace that doesn't have the same type of facilities or resources that you might have. For example, here in Boston. And I want to do what Calvin Mires does or I want to bring essences of what you do into my teaching and learning to benefit my community, my school, my students. What's some of your best advice? You know, I always want to send folks away from the program with some piece of that nugget you should know.

Calvin Mires: [00:43:16] Well, you start with you can't fake passion. You can't fake it. So, start with yours. I mean, mine, I'm doing what I love and I'm still doing it. And I think in our field, that is something to be said there, just to still be involved and to be working with whom? I'm now working with Woods Hole. You know, the boy from Montana doesn't grow up to work in Woods Hole without really loving what they do, because you can't fake it. And then, recognize it. You'll know what it is, you'll get it.

Calvin Mires: [00:43:48] I talk in this kind of metaphorical terms, but here's a biological one, when I feel goosebumps. And I'm talking literal goosebumps. When I'm looking at somebody and maybe you can see it in their eyes or maybe they say something and you're just like, "Yes." And pursue that. Connections, it's still about people. I mean, you're absolutely right. We can get all the knowledge at our fingertips. Well, I don't want to digress, but it's still about connections.

Calvin Mires: [00:44:20] And no matter where you are, you take those phones away and you're telling a story and suddenly, somebody looks at you with a spark in their eye, that is a connection. And see where it goes. Not all of them work out, but, you know, find your passion and a passion is great, but I am also a huge believer in persistence, right? If you're passionate about it, I mean, look how long we've known each other. And I've taken turns and done different things. And look for opportunities.

Calvin Mires: [00:44:53] I teach classes from global human issues to shipwrecks and maritime archaeology to Middle Eastern cultures, because it's all interesting. Learning is interesting. But I do this in parts because I am persistently trying to pursue my passion, education. When we come to that, it's really growth. It's the journey we're on. We're all on our own hero's journey. And good, bad experiences, it's all education. We're all stemming all the time, all the day. We're learning about ourselves, our environment. And that human growth is a powerful connection.

Calvin Mires: [00:45:36] So, when I go and talk about maritime archaeology, I'm not talking about my field, I'm talking about human growth and how we can facilitate that in ways that are unexpected. So, you don't need any technology for any of that. Look, you'll feel it. And, you know, don't let anyone kill your unicorn and look for people who get it. And it doesn't matter who's in the room, that's pretty universal. And it's held me in good stead on where I am now. So, that would be my kind of advice as people go out there. And I think if you listen both to other people and also, your kind of your own internal, you'll know the good ones.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:20] You will. I would agree. Definitely. And you're one of the good ones, Calvin. So, thank you very much for joining us today.

Calvin Mires: [00:46:28] It's been my absolute honor. And, you know, this isn't video podcasts out there, I want to give just a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Annalies Corbin who started me on this path. And just thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:43] You're very welcome. The pleasure has been all mine. There are so much work yet to do.

Calvin Mires: [00:46:47] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:48] So, you're not off the hook.

Calvin Mires: [00:46:48] No, absolutely. I wouldn't want it. I love the work. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:52] Excellent. Thank you. Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media at Annalies Corbin. And join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to re-imagine education.